



# U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

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## **HANFORD'S WASTE TREATMENT PLANT PROJECT ACHIEVES VOLUNTARY PROTECTION PROGRAM MERIT STATUS**

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has awarded the Hanford Waste Treatment Plant (WTP) project the agency's Voluntary Protection Program (VPP) Merit status for excellence and leadership in safety and health.

DOE initiated the VPP in January 1994 to promote improved safety and health performance through public recognition of outstanding voluntary safety programs. Similar to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's VPP, DOE's program provides several proven benefits to participating sites, including improved labor/management relations, reduced workplace injuries and illnesses, increased employee involvement, improved morale, and public recognition.

The DOE-VPP includes Star and Merit status. Contractors whose programs meet the requirements for outstanding safety and health programs receive Star recognition, the highest achievement level. Contractors with highly effective programs, who commit themselves to attain Star status within a five-year period, receive Merit recognition. A site can retain Merit recognition for a maximum of five years.

"Working on a construction project of this size and complexity requires a strong focus and commitment to safety by both the workers and management," said Shirley Olinger, Manager of the DOE Office of River Protection. "The WTP project has demonstrated considerable commitment and leadership to changing the safety culture over the last several years and the result has been obtaining VPP Merit status. I congratulate the workers and management and encourage you to continue your journey and maintain your focus to achieve VPP Star status."

The WTP project is the largest federal construction project in the nation, employing hundreds of craft and professional workers to design and build a radiochemical processing plant to vitrify (immobilize in glass) millions of gallons of radioactive and chemical waste at Hanford. Workers on this project face numerous potential hazards, requiring a high degree of focus and strong commitment to quality and safety leadership.

The WTP's VPP Steering Committee, comprised of onsite non-manual and craft workers, completed the project's application for VPP status in December 2007. In October 2008, a team of DOE safety and health experts performed a week-long onsite evaluation of work practices throughout all areas of the site and interviewed employees and management to assess their knowledge of VPP processes. That assessment resulted in a recommendation to award Merit status to the WTP project.

“Achieving VPP Merit status requires a strong partnership between management and staff,” said WTP Project Director Bill Elkins. “We utilized worker knowledge, expertise, and involvement to strengthen our safety culture. I offer my gratitude to everyone who worked so hard to achieve Merit status.”

“To achieve Merit status at a site like this is a huge accomplishment,” said WTP VPP Coordinator Jon Yeich. “We could not have come this far without the type of commitment demonstrated from all levels of employees at the WTP; craft, non-manual, and our management team.”

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